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JEWISH PROVERBS

משלי חכמים *Proverbs of the Sages*. Collections of Proverbs, Ethical Precepts from the Talmud and Midrashim, with Explanations and English Translations. By M. GOLDMAN, New York: 1911. pp. 287.

Ancient Jewish Proverbs. Compiled and classified by the Rev. A. COHEN. London: JOHN MURRAY. (Wisdom of the East Series.), 1911. pp. 127.

There have been numerous collections of Jewish proverbs both in Hebrew and modern languages. The Hebrew language is especially adapted to this form of literature: its brevity, its force gives it the power to express truth pithily. Then, too, there is something in the Jewish nature and habit that lends itself to laconic utterance and to the habit of giving a significant and even a sarcastic and witty turn to a phrase that underlies and forms the essence of the gnome. The appreciation of the proverb by Jews has been cultivated from the most ancient times, as shown in the Bible, and also by the large number of proverbial maxims current among them, and the great pleasure with which they are quoted. No one can read them without feeling the deep insight they express of human nature and their true understanding and evaluation of human conduct. It is, therefore, with special satisfaction that two such excellent collections can be hailed as are contained in the above entitled books.

The first of these, by M. Goldman, is a work of love from one who appreciates Jewish wisdom, and possesses the facilities for giving it a proper typographical expression. It is indeed beautifully printed. Its large *octavo* pages with ample margins and decorative scrolls show how highly the editor, translator, and commentator esteems his work. Its greatest value lies in its association of the original text either in Hebrew or Aramaic with the English translation, giving the reader access to both with the references in each instance of the source whence the saying is taken. Together with this is the translation and explanation in both Hebrew and English. In its 287 ample pages there are

contained 442 maxims, arranged in alphabetical order, and bringing the work through the letter 'i'. The selection has not been strictly confined to the proverb, the maxim current among the people; it includes many a wise saying of famous sage contained in our ancient post-biblical literature. It cannot be said that the English rendering has in every instance been felicitous, as in No. 76, 'Iniquitous deeds redound upon their own perpetrators'; or in No. 74, 'No woman is getting envious without another woman being the cause of it'. The use of idiomatic English would not infrequently have added to the crispness of the translation. Even if he does not always succeed in convincing the reader of the correctness of his interpretation, 'for varied applications lie in art, like nature', still the author of this work has rendered an important service in thus presenting these choice nuggets of wisdom for the present use of the Jewish people in English-speaking countries.

The second of the above titled books is by an English divine, Rev. A. Cohen, late scholar of Emmanuel College in Cambridge University, a disciple of the late Michael Friedländer, to whom the book is dedicated. It is a little volume of 350 Rabbinic proverbs that still claims to be exhaustive of this class of proverb in its strict scientific sense. The work is carefully and accurately performed. Of course the absence of the original text, that forms so important a part of M. Goldman's work, is here marked, but as far as possible this is compensated for by the accuracy of the rendering and the classification into ten chapters; with various sub-headings, viz. Human Existence, Family Life, Human Virtues, Occupations, Rules of Conduct, Vagaries of Fortune, Social Life, Colloquialisms, Miscellaneous. Each proverb is rendered into English with its original source, and its place in the epoch-making works of Leopold Dukes. The explanation of the proverb is given with many illuminating analogies in the gnostic literature of the Jews and other people. The work is furnished with an interesting and instructive introduction, wherein are discussed the nature of proverbs in general and of Jewish proverbs in particular, the source of Jewish proverbs, their language, age, and

characteristics. The work is done in a careful, accurate, and scientific spirit, with use of modern scholarly apparatus. It is a charming book for scholar and layman, for young and old, and opens up abundant opportunity for illustration in homiletic and popular use. It exhibits an aspect of Jewish literature in which the soundness, shrewdness, and depth of Jewish character are exhibited and transmitted.

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